

14-1516 DUNCAN V. OWENS

DECISION BELOW: 781 F.3d 360

LOWER COURT CASE NUMBER: 14-1419

QUESTION PRESENTED:

No clearly established precedent of this Court holds that it violates the Constitution for a finder of fact to infer a criminal defendant's motive when the motive is a non-element of the offense and is not directly established by the evidence at trial. Respondent claimed that the judge at his bench trial made improper "extrajudicial" findings regarding his motive and thus found him guilty based on evidence not produced at trial. The state appellate court upheld respondent's conviction, holding that the trial court's speculation regarding motive was harmless. The Seventh Circuit overturned respondent's conviction on habeas corpus review, finding that the trial court's inference about motive violated respondent's right to have his guilt adjudicated solely on the evidence introduced at trial, and that the error was not harmless.

Did the Seventh Circuit violate 28 U.S.C. § 2254 and a long line of this Court's decisions by awarding habeas relief in the absence of clearly established precedent from this Court?

CERT. GRANTED 10/1/2015